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Reserve

SUBJECT-MATTER SPECIALISTS HELP TRAIN INEXPERIENCED FARM LABOR 1/

Most specialists are not assigned, formally, to Extension's Farm Labor Program. All specialists, however, are faced with the problem of helping farmers produce food this year with an increased proportion of unskilled labor. Just as they and the farmers together have accepted previous problems of too little rainfall, too little protein supplement, too few pressure canners, or too many grasshoppers, so now they are faced with an emergency scarcity of trained help.

The current shortage of farm labor is a limiting factor in all farm and home programs. Making the most of the labor available is one of the best remedies. The subject-matter specialists, with the farmers, are the ones best qualified to develop programs and materials for training green workers to do specific jobs correctly and quickly.

The actual training of Mexican Nationals, POW's, city women and youth, and migrant labor will be done largely by county agents, farm labor assistants, and the farmer employers. Those who train must first decide what is the best method to do a job and what is the most effective way to teach it. That is where the specialists come in. Those decisions are their stock in trade. Their skill in determining the best methods is what makes them specialists.

A typical example of what county agents are facing can be illustrated by this incident which occurred in connection with a recent trip in the Western States.

Did you ever thin sugar beets? Most of you never did. Most of you have no interest in beets, beyond the sugar that they produce. The county workers in Colorado were in the same fix--except that they had to teach a trainload of Mexican Nationals to thin beets. These county workers called on the State specialists for help--and got it.

If you are an expert in thinning beets don't read this paragraph. You won't like it. You, probably, thin beets in a slightly different way. If you have never thinned beets read this Colorado specialist's description of the job carefully. Visualize yourself in a field of beets and see if you can follow through the job as he has outlined it.

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Break-down of Thinning Beets

One beet every 10 inches. Short-handled hoe--one row at a time.

STEPS

KEY POINTS

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| 1. Stand between rows. | At end of row. Facing row to left. |
| 2. Bend over row in front of you. | Keep bent over. Don't rise and squat. |
| 3. Make first chop. | Leave single plant or small block of plants at left of hoe.
Chop 1 inch below surface of soil. |
| 4. Thin first block of plants. | With left hand. To single plant without damaging its roots. |
| 5. Make second chop. | To nearest single if within 12 inches. If no single, to plant about 10 inches from first plant. |
| 6. Step down row. | Sideways. About 10 inches. |
| 7. Make third chop. | To right of second single plant or block. |
| 8. Thin second block. | To single plant. |
| 9. Repeat chopping and thinning. | To end of row. |

Over-all key points for gaining speed:

1. Look ahead for singles.
2. Chop slantways to combine chops 1 and 2 in one stroke.
3. Chop with right hand and thin with left at the same time.

That break-down is an excellent reference for those who have received personal training. It is helpful almost to the point of adequacy for teaching beet thinning by mail. It is a real contribution to the food program by a State specialist who cannot be everywhere at the same time. It is but one example of many that might have been used.

Some jobs require judgment as well as trained action. Judgment is acquired more rapidly after the routine mechanics of the job have been learned. For example, in learning to drive a tractor the first job is to master the controls. Developing the judgment needed for safe driving comes afterward. To irrigate a field of beets the new worker must learn how to control the flow of water before he can develop judgment as to when he should increase or decrease it. An inexperienced helper in the lambing shed learns how to catch, hold, and handle sheep as the first step in learning when a ewe and new-born lamb should be cut out and penned together. Outlining and teaching the routine of a job is the foundation on which to develop sound judgment in the new employee.

Teaching an inexperienced worker to do a job correctly, quickly, and conscientiously aids our food-production program. Subject-matter specialists have a real opportunity to help the county workers do this job.